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# **Parliamentary security politics as politicisation by volume**

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## **Abstract**

The assumption that the policy area of security has depoliticising effects has diverted attention from the diverse ways in which parliamentarians are increasingly active on security. This development represents a shift away from the traditional executive-dominated security state and a challenge to security theories that assume security to be characterised by depoliticisation in the form of democratic marginalisation. The security literature assumes parliaments to be at worst irrelevant and at best a variable affecting the decisions of states, governments, and leaders. Analysing the work of UK parliamentary committees from the 1980s to the present, this article presents an original understanding of politicisation that subverts this view. This is politicisation *by volume* – increased amounts of parliamentary activity – in contrast to the more usually understood qualitative forms of politicisation such as increased polarisation, controversy or contestation (although the different forms of politicisation are not mutually exclusive). The article finds that parliamentary committee activity on security has increased from a base of almost nothing in the 1980s and before to regular and broad engagement in the present.

## **Keywords:**

Politicisation, security, parliaments, committees, arena-shifting, UK

## **Introduction**

Although controversies and episodes of intense contestation are important points of punctuation in security politics, general increases in parliamentary activity on security may be more revealing of changes in security politics over time. As the English constitutional commentator Walter Bagehot once wrote, 'we may easily miss the permanent course of the

political curve if we engross our minds with its cusps and conjugate points'.<sup>1</sup> The article makes the case for a novel understanding of politicisation based on volume of activity, rather than more qualitative measures such as controversy. Politicisation by volume and qualitative forms of politicisation are not mutually exclusive; for example, controversies may of course generate increased political activity, and increased political activity may include the substantive contestation of policy. However, the concept of politicisation by volume captures the significance of increases in more routine forms of political activity that are not necessarily controversial or polarising.

This is a particularly important move in security studies, which as a discipline is used to dealing with security as a depoliticising 'exception' to normal politics rather than as an area of 'normal' political activity. It is also significant in the context of security policy and practice, from which – historically – parliaments were excluded in favour of executive prerogative and secrecy. While qualitative forms of politicisation may be seen, for example, in episodes of parliamentary struggle over war powers, intelligence scandals or draconian anti-terrorism legislation, in contrast, politicisation by volume often stems from a general increase in routine parliamentary activity, where greater numbers of debates, inquiries, votes and so on indicate increased 'politicisation' of an issue, whether controversial or not. This focus on parliamentary security politics simultaneously addresses a recognised gap in the literature: as recently as 2016 Julie Kaarbo and Daniel Kenealy stated that 'there is little systematic research on parliaments' role in security policy because it is assumed that parliaments are unimportant'.<sup>2</sup> This is now beginning to change. For example, James Strong has examined how the UK has been developing a constitutional norm of parliamentary votes on military action.<sup>3</sup> This issue has been a productive for scholars elsewhere too.<sup>4</sup>

However, this emerging literature still conceives of security in traditional conceptual terms and does not account for the broadening of security governance in recent decades, which

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, (Project Gutenberg, 1896). 17.

<sup>2</sup> Juliet Kaarbo and Daniel Kenealy, "No, Prime Minister: Explaining the House of Commons' Vote on Intervention in Syria," *European Security* 25, no. 1 (2016): 30.

<sup>3</sup> James Strong, "The War Powers of the British Parliament: What Has Been Established and What Remains Unclear?," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2018); "Interpreting the Syria Vote: Parliament and British Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (2015b); "Why Parliament Now Decides on War: Tracing the Growth of the Parliamentary Prerogative through Syria, Libya and Iraq," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17, no. 4 (2015a).

<sup>4</sup> Sandra Dieterich, Hartwig Hummel, and Stefan Marschall, *Parliamentary War Powers: A Survey of 25 European Parliaments* (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2010); Daniel Schade, "Limiting or Liberating? The Influence of Parliaments on Military Deployments in Multinational Settings," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2018); Tapio Raunio, "Parliament as an Arena for Politicisation: The Finnish Eduskunta and Crisis Management Operations," *ibid.*

as this article argues, is a central factor in increased parliamentary activity on security.<sup>5</sup> For example, in their introduction to a recent special issue on 'Parliaments and Security Policy', Patrick A. Mello and Dirk Peters write, 'the general focus of the Special Issue as a whole...rests primarily on 'hard' security issues related to war involvement, military operations, and the use of force.'<sup>6</sup> And when their contributing authors discuss the politicisation of security they mean qualitative forms mentioned above: increased controversy, contestation and partisanship around security issues.<sup>7</sup> While not unimportant, what these studies miss is the long-run trend of increasing parliamentary activity on security – the 'permanent course of the political curve' rather than its 'cusps and conjugate points'<sup>8</sup> – which this article calls politicisation by volume.

In short, the argument rests on two empirical claims. First, UK parliamentary activity on security has increased since the 1980s. Second, the meaning and practice of 'security' has expanded in the same timeframe. In the UK in the 1980s and before, security was a matter of executive prerogative, secrecy and disavowed intelligence agencies. Security was a constitutionally exceptional form of government that it would be fair to describe as a 'secret state'.<sup>9</sup> There was little parliamentary activity on security for three reasons: first, the government jealously guarded its executive prerogatives; second, many (but not all) parliamentarians deferred to these prerogatives and felt it was right not to ask too many questions; and third, security itself was a much narrower policy area than today and offered fewer opportunities for parliamentary activity.<sup>10</sup> In more technical language this configuration could be described it as 'institutionalised securitisation': a sedimentation of security signifiers and exceptional prerogatives as posited by Buzan *et al.*<sup>11</sup>

Today, these depoliticising hindrances have declined and there has been a quantifiable increase in activity on security: parliamentarians have scrutinised a slew of new security-

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<sup>5</sup> Famously in 1991, in what now seems like a final and forlorn stand against any conceptual broadening of the meaning of security, neorealist scholar Stephen Walt wrote: 'security studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use and control of military force, [and the] specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war', Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 213.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick A. Mello and Dirk Peters, "Parliaments in Security Policy: Involvement, Politicisation, and Influence," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2018): 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Bagehot, *The English Constitution*. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State : Preparing for the Worst, 1945-2010*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> For more on the political sociology of parliamentary marginalisation and deference on security, see Andrew W. Neal, *Security as Politics: Beyond the State of Exception* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). One exception was the repeated creation and renewal of anti-terrorism legislation, where parliament acted as a perennial rubber-stamp despite intense politicised debates (in the qualitative sense). See "Terrorism, Lawmaking and Democratic Politics: Legislators as Security Actors," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 3 (2012b).

<sup>11</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security : A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo. ; London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 28.

related legislation since 9/11, debated intelligence matters and military deployments, and approximately a quarter of all parliamentary committees have to date conducted substantive inquiries into aspects of security, including many non-traditional security problematisations such as energy security, counter-extremism, and cyber. 'Security' has come to span multiple and perhaps even all government departments and policy areas, as it has in many countries.<sup>12</sup> As Tara McCormack argues: 'Effectively, security has become normalised – it is no longer the core existential area of state policy protected from the normal political procedures but something subject to the same stresses that other aspects of policy are.'<sup>13</sup>

As such, politicisation of security by volume in the UK is a product of the way parliamentary activity tracks the increased security activities of government. For example, the role of departmental select committees is to oversee the activities of specific government departments. As the meaning and practice of 'security' have expanded over the decades, 'security' has entered the work of more government departments, and hence appeared in the activities of a greater number of oversight committees. (Note that this analysis views committee oversight more broadly than the intelligence oversight issues often discussed in this context in relation to the Intelligence and Security Committee.)<sup>14</sup>

The article develops the concept of politicisation by volume as an extension of the literature on depoliticisation developed by Peter Burnham, Matthew Flinders and others.<sup>15</sup> This understands depoliticisation as a form of arena-shifting whereby issues or policy areas are removed from public contestation in favour of ostensibly apolitical experts or processes. In this light, a form of politicisation can be seen in the reverse process, whereby issues appear in political arenas – parliament in this case – from which they were previously absent or excluded. By extension, politicisation by volume is when this happens frequently enough to become a

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<sup>12</sup> The National Security Strategy published in 2010 offered a comprehensive approach. It not only anticipated traditional threats but also the possibility of 'national security risks' arising from breakdowns and disruptions in almost any sector of social or economic life. Anne Hammerstad and Ingrid Boas, "National Security Risks? Uncertainty, Austerity and Other Logics of Risk in the UK Government's National Security Strategy," *Cooperation and Conflict* (2014); HM Government, "A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy," (2010); Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Tara McCormack, "The British National Security Strategy: Security after Representation," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> "The British National Security Strategy: Security after Representation."

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Defty, "Coming in from the Cold: Bringing the Intelligence and Security Committee into Parliament," *Intelligence and National Security* (2018); Peter Gill, "The Intelligence and Security Committee and the Challenge of Security Networks," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 04 (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Burnham, "New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticisation," *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 3, no. 2 (2001); Matthew Flinders and Matt Wood, "Depoliticisation, Governance and the State," *Policy & Politics* 42, no. 2 (2014).

trend. As a trend, it has wider significance than individual stand-out instances of politicisation.

The article thus charts the increasing appearance of security-related issues in the parliamentary arena – specifically in committee activities – over a forty-year period. To do this methodologically, based on meanings and practices of security that have broadened over time, this article uses an open-ended, contextual-hermeneutic understanding of security derived from Felix Ciută.<sup>16</sup> This means taking the security discourses produced by contextual actors at face value.<sup>17</sup> As such, it does not use a strict definition of security, because that definition would have to change over the 40-year period of analysis. It thus rejects the Copenhagen School approach of securitisation which argues that discursive constructions of ‘security’ should be identified by the ‘strict criteria’ of a ‘core logic’ of ‘exception, emergency and...decision’.<sup>18</sup> Such an approach would by definition exclude the non-exceptional, non-emergency, non-decisionistic activity on security charted here. This follows the work of Olaf Corry and others on the rise of non-existential security problematisations, which are often based instead on the ongoing management of risks.<sup>19</sup> A contextual-hermeneutic approach still involves interpretation, of course, and does privilege the security discourses of elite parliamentary actors at the expense of more marginalised societal groups, but this is an explicit methodological choice because the aim is to see how parliamentary activity on the broadening area of security has increased over time.<sup>20</sup> I would add that historically, most parliamentarians *were* marginalised from security, even as political elites.

### **A brief note on politics and democracy**

This article takes parliamentary activity as a form of politics. Its argument is that parliamentary activity on security has increased and therefore security is not necessarily depoliticising in its effects. Before continuing, two important points must be made. First, parliamentary activity is

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<sup>16</sup> Felix Ciută, "Security and the Problem of Context: A Hermeneutical Critique of Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 02 (2009): 320.

<sup>17</sup> This is a simplified version of my methodology, which in a more complex form includes critical reflection on the political role of the researcher, based on the work of Michel Foucault. For more, see: Neal, *Security as Politics*; Claudia Aradau et al., eds., *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Ole Wæver, "Politics, Security, Theory," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4-5 (2011): 478.

<sup>19</sup> Olaf Corry, "Securitisation and 'Riskification': Second-Order Security and the Politics of Climate Change," *Millennium* 40, no. 2 (2012); Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*.

<sup>20</sup> Space does not allow a fuller review of the debate over defining security, but see: Philippe Bourbeau, "Moving Forward Together: Logics of the Securitisation Process," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 1; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*; Jef Huysmans, "Revisiting Copenhagen: Or, on the Creative Development of a Security Studies Agenda in Europe," *European journal of international relations* 4, no. 4 (1998).

not intended as an exclusive or ideal encompassment of ‘politics’. It is a limited notion of what we could and perhaps should take politics to be. Many political struggles – some of which are central to the debates on politicisation discussed below – have been about redefining the legitimate scope of what counts as political. For example, as Cynthia Enloe points out, the feminist point that ‘the personal is political’ is ‘Disturbing...because it means that relationships we once imagined were private or merely social are in fact infused with power, usually unequal power backed up by public authority.’<sup>21</sup> In this light, parliamentary politics, being all too often male, pale and stale, seems to many to be a limitation on politics rather than its apogee.<sup>22</sup> Andreas Kalyvas characterises this form of politics as itself a form of depoliticisation. With a nod to the exceptionalism of war and security he writes that: ‘In ordinary times...politics as usual fits a utilitarian and statist model that is characterised by civic privatism, depoliticisation, and passivity and carried out by political elites, professional bureaucrats, and social technicians.’<sup>23</sup> This may be the case, but does not mean we should ignore developments in the parliamentary arena as irrelevant or ‘not politics’. In the context of security debates and constitutional histories that see parliamentarians as marginalised and security as exceptional, an increase in parliamentary activity on security in the realm of ‘politics as usual’ is significant, political, and perhaps subverts the concept of security itself.

Second, parliamentary politics is not coterminous with democracy. Democracy is too broad and historically-varied as a concept to make glib assumptions about what it is and should be. And given the UK focus of this article, we must appreciate the specificities of British democracy. Although the UK is one of the oldest parliamentary democracies in the world, it does not, for example, have its roots in the sort of republican ideals on which the United States was founded. Alexandra Kelso argues that ‘Parliament’s fundamental role has been to facilitate legitimate government. Consequently, any notion that parliament exists primarily to promote democracy and democratic processes is historically inaccurate.’<sup>24</sup> Parliament was never designed as a ‘check’ or ‘balance’ on the executive, but rather as a means for the legitimisation of government. (Robert Packenham argues that parliaments in one-party states and dictatorships serve the same purpose, but that is another debate.)<sup>25</sup> Bagehot called this ‘The

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<sup>21</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases : Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: Pandora, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Childs, "The Good Parliament," *Bristol, University of Bristol* (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary : Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandra Kelso, *Parliamentary Reform at Westminster* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Packenham, "Legislatures and Political Development," in *Legislatures in Developmental Perspective*, ed. Allan Kornberg and L. D. Musolf (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1970).

efficient secret of the English Constitution' and considered it to be a pillar of strength.<sup>26</sup> So while the parliamentary politics of the UK is conducted (in the lower house at least) by democratically-elected members, the fact of their increased activity on security does not tell us anything straightforward about security becoming more 'democratic'. Nor is it safe to assume, following Alison Howell, that parliamentary politics is any more noble or good than the historical forms of institutionalised securitisation it may replace.<sup>27</sup>

## **Depoliticisation and arena shifting**

To develop the concept of politicisation by volume more fully we will now turn to the British debate on depoliticisation. This emerged primarily as a concern with the neoliberal phenomenon of governments rolling back the responsibilities of the state in favour of markets and technical regulators. Burnham describes depoliticisation as 'the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making'.<sup>28</sup> This can be a deliberate political strategy for ministers to dissociate themselves from controversial or risky issues, 'insulating them from the adverse consequences of policy failure'.<sup>29</sup> The authors critique this process as not genuinely removing the politics from issues, but rather transferring issues to arenas that are less publicly contestable or democratically accountable.<sup>30</sup> As such, this debate conceives of politicisation as a form of arena-shifting; as Flinders and Buller argue, 'Frequently, the processes or procedures that are commonly referred to under the rubric of depoliticisation might...more accurately be described as "arena-shifting"'.<sup>31</sup>

The depoliticisation process can itself become politicised if it prompts complaints about democratic deficit or unaccountable and distant technocrats, as with many forms of anti-EU politics.<sup>32</sup> Hence the literature explores dynamics whereby governments attempt to depoliticise issues but opponents or interest groups fight to keep them politically alive. Recent authors have thus begun to consider how such a process might be reversed as politicisation. For example, Caroline Kuzemko shows how UK energy policy – for years managed by the technocratic state regulator Ofgem – was pushed back into the arena of parliamentary deliberation and ministerial

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<sup>26</sup> Bagehot, *The English Constitution*. 111.

<sup>27</sup> Alison Howell, "The Global Politics of Medicine: Beyond Global Health, against Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>28</sup> Burnham, "New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticisation."

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Flinders and Jim Buller, "Depoliticisation: Principles, Tactics and Tools," *British Politics* 1, no. 3 (2006): 296.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Zürn, "The Politicization of World Politics and Its Effects: Eight Propositions," *European Political Science Review* 6, no. 1 (2014).



responsibility: non-state actors such as media outlets, think tanks and environmental campaign groups managed to re-politicise the issue by stimulating concerns about the geopolitical instability of foreign energy suppliers and declining domestic fossil fuel output.<sup>33</sup>

While controversy and contestation are important parts of Kuzemko's example, the arena-shifting aspect is key to the accessibility, publicity and accountability of the issue. If an issue is located and contested in a democratic arena such as parliament, it is in principle accessible to the public in a forum where policymakers can be held to account. If it is in the hands of technicians or private interests, this may not be the case. This is similar to the purported depoliticising effects of securitisation, which favours 'the empowerment of a smaller elite'<sup>34</sup> and 'closes down political debate (thereby depoliticising the issue)'.<sup>35</sup> It also hints at the significance of 'security' appearing more frequently in the parliamentary arena.

Colin Hay develops the importance of arenas and arena-shifting in his own framework of politicisation and depoliticisation. He argues that:

we need: (i) to differentiate between the contexts within which political processes might be seen to occur; (ii) to see such contexts or arenas for potential political deliberation as politicized publicly to differing degrees; (iii) to order, and identify a hierarchy amongst, such arenas of potential public politicization; and (iv) to consider the processes of politicization and depoliticization by which issues of contention are 'promoted' or 'relegated' from one arena to another.<sup>36</sup>

Hay then builds his model of politicisation/depoliticisation around a hierarchy of 'contexts' or 'arenas' along a socio-institutional spectrum. He conceptualises these around their inherent 'capacity for agency', because, he argues: 'Politics occurs, and can only occur, in situations in which actors can make a difference'.<sup>37</sup> His differentiated 'arenas' thus represent increasing degrees of capacity for agency and therefore increasing degrees of politicisation. He also associates a rise up the hierarchy of arenas with an increase in the level of deliberation and participation.<sup>38</sup> These arenas range from the non-politicised realm of fate or necessity where no human agency is considered possible, through to the private sphere where personal reflections, questions, choices and agency may emerge, to the public sphere where issues become matters of public debate and concern, and finally to the governmental sphere when issues reach policymaking agendas and political decision.<sup>39</sup> Hay argues that this hierarchy of

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<sup>33</sup> Caroline Kuzemko, "Politicising UK Energy: What 'Speaking Energy Security' Can Do," *Policy & Politics* 42, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>34</sup> Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 23; Wæver, "Politics, Security, Theory," 469.

<sup>35</sup> Flinders and Wood, "Depoliticisation, Governance and the State," 164.

<sup>36</sup> Colin Hay, *Why We Hate Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-82.

increasingly political spheres offers a way of judging the increasing politicisation and potential for agency attached to specific issues. Politicisation means moving issues further up the hierarchy, while depoliticisation runs in the other direction. The benefit of this quasi-spatial conceptualisation is that it offers a way to identify the presence or absence of issues in particular arenas and the degree to which an issue is of private, public or governmental concern. This matters politically. One of Hay's strongest examples is domestic violence, which was once considered by policymakers to be a private matter but through successful feminist campaigning has become part of policy agendas and discussed in the governmental arena.<sup>40</sup>

Laura Jenkins has criticised this debate for treating the state as the pinnacle of a socio-political hierarchy, which risks narrowing the meaning of politics and politicisation to matters concerning the state and demoting the importance of other political struggles and actors.<sup>41</sup> While Jenkins makes an important point, it may take on a different hue for security questions. The state has been so historically, institutionally and symbolically dominant in the security field that it remains an important starting point for analysis. The presence of security issues in Hay's 'lower' non-state political spheres could, for example, signify the decline of exclusive sovereign security prerogatives. Similarly, if security increasingly appears in parliament, and not just behind the closed doors of government, this may signify a shift in the traditionally 'excepted' relationship of security to 'normal politics'. However, Hay does not distinguish between the arenas of parliament and government, which is a limitation of his framework.

The political significance of this kind of politicising and depoliticising arena-shifting should by now be clear, but some ambiguities remain. The shifting of issues in or out of political arenas may be deliberate actions, as when ministers hand responsibility to others or assume responsibility where they did not have it before. Arena-shifting may also be forced politically through mobilisation of a variety of actors and their generation of controversy, as with Kuzemko's energy policy example above. But arena shifts may also occur without obvious controversy and still be significant politically. A parliamentary committee may choose to launch an independent inquiry on an issue for all sorts of reasons – not only responding to public controversy, but also shadowing the activities of government departments, and perhaps even because of the particular interests of its members and especially its chair.<sup>42</sup> Doing so on

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>41</sup> Laura Jenkins, "The Difference Genealogy Makes: Strategies for Politicisation or How to Extend Capacities for Autonomy," *Political Studies* 59, no. 1 (2011): 158.

<sup>42</sup> Marc Geddes, *Dramas at Westminster: Select Committees and the Quest for Accountability* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). Chapter 7.

an issue that was not previously present in the parliamentary arena would represent an arena-shift that brought an issue into public deliberation. This is all the more notable with issue areas that parliamentarians did not previously handle such as security, either because they were prevented from doing so or because they chose not to through deference to executive security prerogatives.

The concept of politicisation by volume developed in this article derives from these points. While individual instances of ‘security’ appearing in parliamentary arenas may each have their own explanations and context, when taken in aggregate, a trend of arena-shifts may signify a general movement of security issues from a situation of ‘institutionalised securitisation’ or ‘exceptional politics’ to one of ‘normal politics’. If numbers of parliamentary inquiries, debates, motions, and votes on security-related issues and policies are increasing, then this represents an increased volume of political activity, which this article argues should be understood as a form of politicisation. This increase in activity can be observed and measured directly through a number of empirical data sources as noted above. Politicisation by volume is not mutually exclusive with more qualitative forms of politicisation such as controversy or actor mobilisation, nor with discourses of emergency and exceptionality.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, these are often drivers of an increased volume of political activity. The point is that politicisation by volume can occur without these qualitative aspects too, as with increases of more routine parliamentary activity in security-related issues and policies. Again, if we only focus on the controversial or exceptional (Bagehot’s ‘cusps and conjugate points’) we may miss other trends (‘the permanent course of the political curve’). This builds on the wider argument made in the introduction of this special issue: that we should be careful not to simply interpret the politics surrounding ‘security’ by resorting to well-worn concepts and explanations, but rather remain open to alternative lenses offered elsewhere in political science.

Conceptually, politicisation by volume is distinct. It may go hand in hand with qualitative forms of politicisation whereby issues become contested and controversial, but not necessarily. Being directly measurable, politicisation by volume also avoids interpretive issues over what counts as a controversy or emergency. It is not ‘securitisation’ because it is not necessarily ‘exceptional’ (however defined) and does not limit politics. Of course, parliaments and parliamentarians may still play a part in the construction of security issues and even engage in full securitisation, but this does not characterise much of the increased political activity

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<sup>43</sup> For more on the affective and discursive aspect of security emergencies in a parliamentary context, see Andrew W. Neal, "Normalization and Legislative Exceptionalism: Counterterrorist Lawmaking and the Changing Times of Security Emergencies," *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 3 (2012a).

described below. Neither is politicisation by volume ‘desecuritisation’, because it does not unmake security issues, which remain security issues when handled through ‘normal’ parliamentary practices in this way.

## Data and methods

Committee activity is just one of several possible areas of parliamentary business that could be investigated for increases in activity on ‘security’, or politicisation by volume. For example, Bochel *et al* in their work on UK parliamentary scrutiny of the intelligence services also consider parliamentary debates and questions, early day motions and all-party groups.<sup>44</sup> Legislative voting patterns could also be considered.<sup>45</sup> Each would require different practical methodologies in terms of how to find and analyse the data. Scholars such as Bates *et al* have begun to develop big data methodologies to analyse increasingly machine-readable parliamentary data such as appearances of key terms in debates.<sup>46</sup> However, this article chooses to analyse select committee inquiry activity for four reasons. First, the numbers of relevant committee inquiries over the four-decade research period are at a human scale; they are in the tens and hundreds rather than hundreds and thousands, and thus are manageable enough to be parsed manually and with basic search functions, rather than with quantitative methods. Second, the committees’ inquiry titles, remits and content allow for interpretation to judge their meaningfulness in their own right rather than, for example, having to refer to other parliamentary factors (as one would have to do to understand voting behaviour in relation to relative parliamentary seat numbers of the government and opposition parties, for example). Third, UK select committees have a large degree of autonomy from government, which means their activity is not merely a function of something else.<sup>47</sup> Fourth, select committees stand somewhat aside from partisan struggle in parliament, which means that the motivations behind inquiries do not boil down to simple parliamentary arithmetic and should not be interpreted as mere tactical attempts to land blows on the ‘other side’.<sup>48</sup> In short, committee inquiries are

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<sup>44</sup> Hugh Bochel, Andrew Defty, and Jane Kirkpatrick, *Watching the Watchers: Parliament and the Intelligence Services* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 128.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Bright, "In Search of the Politics of Security," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17, no. 4 (2014); Neal, "Normalization and Legislative Exceptionalism: Counterterrorist Lawmaking and the Changing Times of Security Emergencies."; "Terrorism, Lawmaking and Democratic Politics: Legislators as Security Actors."

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Bates, Mark Goodwin, and Stephen McKay, "Do UK MPs Engage More with Select Committees since the Wright Reforms?: An Interrupted Time Series Analysis, 1979-2016," *Parliamentary Affairs* April (2017).

<sup>47</sup> Lucy Fisher, "The Growing Power and Autonomy of House of Commons Select Committees: Causes and Effects," *The Political Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2015): 76.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament Works* (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 201.

substantive and can be interpreted in their own terms to a greater extent than some other forms of parliamentary activity. They are a relatively autonomous and thus reasonably independent measure of politicisation by volume. Their activity in general tracks government activity but it is not a direct function of it.

The aim in this analysis section is to chart instances of committee activity on security-related issues and to discern trends over time. It is the increased volume of activity that is significant. Yet first it is important to qualify what committee engagement with security may and may not mean. It may not mean more democratic control over security policy, because that is not the function of Westminster select committees. It may mean more influence on government, but that remains rather intangible.<sup>49</sup> The analysis cannot tell us whether committee activity is adequate to meet the challenges that expanding and proliferating security governance practices pose to society – this enormous normative and empirical question is beyond the scope of this article. There are many more questions that could be asked about committee practices themselves, such as how effective they are in gathering and scrutinising evidence from government and non-government witnesses.<sup>50</sup> This analysis is designed only to chart the politicisation by volume of security in parliament and to consider what it means for the conceptual and constitutional relationship between politics and security.

The findings are based on a manual search of all Commons and Lords select committee inquiries from 1979 to 2017. The method was as follows. Committee engagements with ‘security’ were noted when they when they expressed contemporaneous meanings and usages of ‘security’ and associated language (such as war, intelligence, terrorism and defence), and appeared meaningful to the actors as security-related. This excluded examples where the topic could be interpreted in security terms by imposing criteria from outside but was not discussed in security terms by the committee itself, such as the 2015 JCHR inquiry into ‘Violence against women and girls’ which the committee did not frame as ‘security’ even though many scholars would.<sup>51</sup> Committee inquiries were noted as relating to security when they were wholly or substantially about security topics, but not when security was only mentioned in passing. The method was designed to treat the meaning and scope of ‘security’ as a moving target, in order to avoid imposing any of the many current meanings of security onto historical times when

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<sup>49</sup> Meg Russell and Philip Cowley, "The Policy Power of the Westminster Parliament: The "Parliamentary State" and the Empirical Evidence," *Governance* 29, no. 1 (2016); Meghan Benton and Meg Russell, "Assessing the Impact of Parliamentary Oversight Committees: The Select Committees in the British House of Commons," *Parliamentary Affairs* (2012).

<sup>50</sup> Geddes, *Dramas at Westminster: Select Committees and the Quest for Accountability*.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. L. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Security: Discourse as Practice* (Zed Books, 2013).

those meanings did not exist; for example, 'energy security' does not appear in committee inquiry titles until 2011 (House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee: 'The UK's Energy Supply: Security or Independence?') even though the material issues raised (e.g. volatility of foreign hydrocarbon supplies etc.) could almost certainly be found under different terminology in previous decades. This is not a perfect approach. There are grounds to argue over specific interpretations, inclusions and exclusions. However, even if different interpretative choices were made, the overall trend would be similar.

Before considering what the findings mean and what has caused these trends, this section will straightforwardly present the patterns of committee activity on security by decade. The analysis begins in 1979 because this is when the current system of departmental select committees was created. Initially there were 12 and today there are 21, reflecting a growth in the number of government departments. However, this date is not fundamental in the analysis of committee work and somewhat arbitrary in the argument presented here; little if anything would change if an earlier date were chosen. Parliament has used select committees for many scrutiny and oversight purposes for centuries. And while departmental select committees are a central plank in the oversight of government, they are only one part of the committee system, and less than a quarter of the total number, which at the time of writing is 116. This analysis is of all select committees. There are also topical committees that examine cross cutting issues such as Public Accounts, Public Administration, Women and Equalities and so on; internal committees concerned with parliament and its processes including Backbench Business and the Committee on Standards; House of Lords committees that are also divided into topical and internal (but not departmental) themes; joint committees on issues such as Human Rights and the National Security Strategy; and other general issue committees such as Delegated Legislation. There are also statutory committees that perform functions set out in law, one of which is the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (which was previously not 'of Parliament' but only of parliamentary membership)<sup>52</sup>. This variegated system makes an analysis of committee activity over time challenging because the number and form has changed, and there is not a simple way to chart the changing numbers over time. And while it would be simpler to focus only on departmental select committees, this would miss activity in committees such as the Joint Committees on Human Rights and the National Security Strategy, or in more esoteric committees relating to internal procedures such as the timetabling of debates or the rights of parliamentarians. The latter can be important for security issues, such the 1987

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<sup>52</sup> Defty, "Coming in from the Cold: Bringing the Intelligence and Security Committee into Parliament."

Committee on Privileges report on ‘Speaker's order of 22 January 1987 on a matter of national security’, which discussed whether the Commons Speaker could prevent questions on national security from being heard. It should also be noted that in the Westminster system, select committees are separate from legislative committees or ‘public bill committees’ that scrutinise legislation at its formal committee stage. Legislative committees are not included in the analysis; if they were, they would also show an increase in activity on security, but this would be entirely a product of the legislative programme of government. Legislative committees are also heavily whipped, unlike select committees.

The following tables lists substantive committee engagements with security by decade. They do not list every single example because for some committees, such as defence, there would be too many. The count is of the numbers of committees that engaged, not the total numbers of individual committee engagements; the latter would require further analysis, particularly for committees very active on security such as Defence. This would be valuable in showing politicisation by volume in more detail but is beyond the resource and space available for this article. The aim is to show the trend of security spreading across the areas of policy and parliamentary business covered by committees, rather than the raw number of committee engagements. When committees were renamed or repurposed, they are listed under a single heading where possible. The date a committee was created is noted if during the time frame.

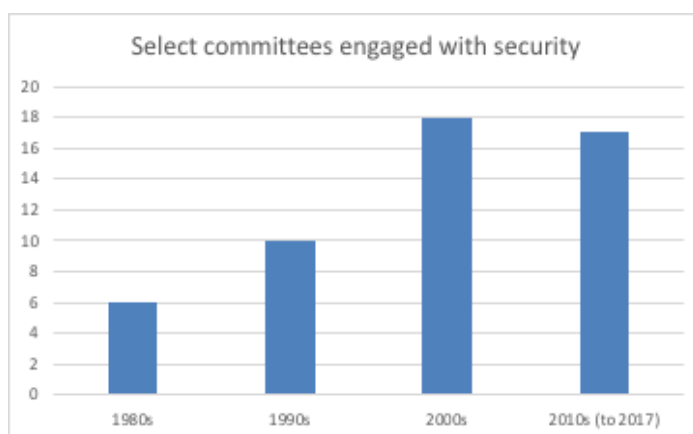


Table 1 – overview of quantitative increase in Select Committees engaged with security 1980-2017

<b>Table 2: 1980s<sup>53</sup> - 6 Committees engaged with security</b>	<b>Committee reports (selected examples only for some prolific committees)</b>
Defence	1980 'The D notice system' 1980 'Strategic nuclear weapons policy' 1985 'The use of merchant shipping for defence purposes.' 1987 'The implications for the United Kingdom of ballistic missile defence'
Foreign Affairs	1984-85 'The economic and political security of small states' 1985 'The events surrounding the weekend of 1-2 May 1982' [Belgrano inquiry] 1987 'Current UK policy towards the Iran/Iraq conflict'
Home Affairs	1984-85 'Special Branch'
Privileges	1987 'Speaker's order of 22 January 1987 on a matter of national security'
Public Accounts	1984-85, 'Maintenance of major RAF equipments [sic]' 1985-6 'Production costs of defence equipment' 1987-88 'Computer security in government departments'
Transport	1985 and 1998 'Airport Security'

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<sup>53</sup> (inc. 1979 when the parliamentary session began)



<b>Table 3: 1990s – 10 Committees engaged with security</b>	<b>Committee reports (selected examples only for some prolific committees)</b>
Defence	1991 ‘Royal Naval Submarines’ 1993 ‘United Kingdom peacekeeping and intervention forces.’ 1995 ‘Reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition.’ 1998 ‘NATO enlargement’
Foreign Affairs	1994 ‘UK policy on weapons proliferation and arms control in the post-Cold War era’ 1999 ‘Sierra Leone’
Home Affairs	1994 ‘The Private Security Industry’ 1999 ‘Accountability of the Security Service’
Intelligence and Security (created 1994) (only special reports listed, not annual reports)	1996 ‘Report on Security Service Work Against Organised Crime’ 1999 ‘Sierra Leone’
International Development (created 1997)	1998 ‘Conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction’ 1999 ‘Kosovo: The Human Crisis’
Liaison Committee	2000 ‘Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive’
House of Lords European Union Select Committee (sub-committee on EU Common Foreign and Security Policy)	2000 ‘The Common European Policy on Security and Defence’
Northern Ireland Affairs	1997 ‘Composition, recruitment and training of the RUC’ [Royal Ulster Constabulary]
Public Accounts	1992 ‘The costs and receipts arising from the Gulf conflict’ 1996 ‘Management of the military operations in the former Yugoslavia’
Trade and Industry	1996 ‘Export licensing and BMARC’ 1997 ‘Aspects of defence procurement and industrial policy’

<b>Table 4: 2000s – 18 Committees engagements with security</b>	<b>Committee reports (selected examples only for some prolific committees)</b>
Constitution (Lords)	2005 Terrorism Bill 2005 Identity Cards Bill 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Bill 2006 Armed Forces Bill 2006 ‘Waging war: Parliament's role and responsibility’ 2008 ‘Counter-Terrorism Bill: The Role of Ministers, Parliament and the Judiciary’ 2009 ‘Fast-track Legislation: Constitutional Implications and Safeguards’ 2009 ‘Surveillance: Citizens and the State’, 2010 Crime and Security Bill
Defence	2004 ‘Lessons of Iraq’ 2007 ‘The future of the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper’ 2008 ‘UK/US defence trade cooperation treaty’
Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (Lords)	2008 Iraq War Inquiry Bill 2008 Counter-Terrorism Bill
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2003 ‘Climate change, water security and flooding’
Energy and Climate Change Committee (created 2008)	2009 ‘Securing food supplies up to 2050: the challenges faced by the UK’
European Union (Lords)	2004 ‘EU Security Strategy’ 2005 ‘European Defence Agency’
Foreign Affairs	2001 ‘Foreign policy aspects of the war against terrorism’ 2002 ‘The decision to go to war in Iraq’
Home Affairs	2001 ‘First report on the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill 2001’ 2007 ‘A surveillance society?’ 2009 ‘Project CONTEST: the Government's counter-terrorism strategy’

<b>2000s – 18 Committees engagements with security (cont)</b>	
Intelligence and Security (created 1994) (only special reports listed, not annual reports)	2002 ‘Inquiry into Intelligence, Assessments and Advice prior to the Terrorist Bombings on Bali’ 2003 ‘Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction – Intelligence and Assessments’ 2005 ‘The Handling of detainees by UK Intelligence Personnel in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay and Iraq’ 2006 ‘Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005’ 2007 ‘Rendition’ 2009 ‘Review of the Intelligence on the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005’
International Development (created 1997)	2004 ‘Preparing for the Humanitarian Consequences of Possible Military Action Against Iraq’ 2005 ‘Darfur, Sudan: The responsibility to protect’ 2006 ‘Conflict and Development: Peacebuilding and Post-conflict Reconstruction’
Joint Committee on Human Rights (created 1998)	2001 ‘Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill 2001’ 2008 ‘Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism’ 2009 ‘Closing the immunity gap: UK legislation on genocide and torture and related offences and redress for torture victims’
Northern Ireland Affairs	2002 ‘The Financing of Terrorism in Northern Ireland’ 2008 ‘Policing and Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland: the Cost of Policing the Past’ 2009 ‘The Omagh Bombing: Access to Intelligence’
Public Accounts	2002 ‘Ministry of Defence: Combat Identification’ 2003 ‘Ministry of Defence: Building an air manoeuvre capability: the introduction of the Apache Helicopter’ 2007 ‘Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces’ 2008 ‘The privatisation of QinetiQ’ 2009 ‘Defence Information Infrastructure’
Public Administration	2007 ‘Reserve Forces’ 2009 ‘The Iraq Inquiry’
Science and Technology (including Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee which replaced the committee from 2008-09)	2003 ‘The Scientific Response to Terrorism’ 2008 ‘Biosecurity in UK research laboratories’
Science and Technology (Lords)	2007 ‘Personal Internet Security’
Scottish Affairs	2008 Employment and skills for the defence industry in Scotland
Transport	2005 ‘UK Transport Security - preliminary report’ 2006 ‘Piracy’

<b>Table 5: 2010-2017 – 17 Committees engaged with security</b>	<b>Committee reports (selected examples only for some prolific committees)</b>
Constitution (Lords)	2010 Terrorist Asset Freezing etc. 2011 Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill 2012 Justice and Security Bill 2013 ‘Constitutional arrangements for the use of armed force’ 2014 Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill 2016 Investigatory Powers Bill
Communities and Local Government	2010 ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’
Defence	2011 ‘The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy’ 2014 ‘UK Armed Forces: Legal framework for future operations’ 2016 ‘UK military operations in Syria and Iraq’
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2011 ‘The UK’s Energy Supply: Security or Independence?’
Foreign Affairs	2011 ‘1st report - Future inter-parliamentary scrutiny of EU foreign, defence and security policy’ 2013 ‘Foreign policy considerations for the UK and Scotland in the event of Scotland becoming an independent country’ 2014 ‘The use of Diego Garcia by the United States’ 2015 ‘The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria’ 2016 ‘The UK’s role in the economic war against ISIL’
Home Affairs	2010 Counter Terrorism Measures in British Airports 2011 ‘New Landscape of Policing’ 2012 ‘Olympics security’ 2013 ‘Counter-terrorism’ 2014 ‘Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000’ 2015 ‘Counter-terrorism: foreign fighters’ 2016 ‘Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point’
Intelligence and Security (created 1994) (only special reports listed, not annual reports)	2013 Access to communications data by the intelligence and security Agencies 2013 Foreign Involvement in the Critical National Infrastructure 2013 GCHQ’s alleged interception of communications under the US PRISM programme 2014 Report on the intelligence relating to the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby 2015 Report on Women in the UK Intelligence Community 2015 Report on Privacy and Security 2016 Report on draft Investigatory Powers Bill 2017 Report on UK Lethal Drone Strikes in Syria
International Development	2013 ‘Global Food Security’
Joint Committee on Human Rights	2012 The Justice and Security Green Paper 2015 Government’s policy on use of drones for targeted killing 2016 ‘Counter-Extremism’

<b>2010-2017 – 17 Committees engaged with security (cont)</b>	
Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (created 2010)	2012 ‘First review of the National Security Strategy 2010’ 2013 ‘The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012’ 2014 ‘The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013-14’ 2015 ‘The next National Security Strategy’ 2016 ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’ 2017 ‘Conflict, Stability and Security Fund’ 2010 ‘The Omagh bombing: some remaining questions’
Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (existed from 2010-2015)	2011 ‘Parliament's role in conflict decisions’ 2014 ‘Parliament's role in conflict decisions: a way forward’
Public Accounts	2014 ‘Army 2020’ 2014 ‘Equipment Plan and Major Projects Report 2014, reforming defence acquisition’ 2017 ‘Defence Equipment Plan 2018–27’
Public Administration, and successor committees	2011 ‘Who does UK National Strategy?’ 2012 ‘Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge?’
Science and Technology (including Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee which replaced the committee from 2008-09)	2012 ‘Devil's bargain? Energy risks and the public’ 2015 ‘Investigatory Powers Bill: technology issues’
Scottish Affairs	2012 ‘The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: Terminating Trident—Days or Decades?’ 2013 ‘The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: How would Separation affect jobs in the Scottish defence industry?’ 2014 ‘The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: A Defence Force for Scotland—A Conspiracy of Optimism?’
Trade and Industry, and successor committees	2012 ‘Scrutiny of Arms Exports Controls’ 2014 ‘Scrutiny of Arms Exports Controls’ 2016 ‘The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen’ (joint inquiry with International Development Committee)
Transport	2013 ‘Land transport security - scope for further EU involvement?’ 2014 ‘Security on the railway’

## Analysis

The committee inquiry titles in themselves reveal something about the broadening meaning and practice of 'security' over the decades, and mostly reflect the security problematisations of their time. It is not clear that there are any cases of committees constructing entirely new problematisations of 'security'. In the 1980s, the problematisations were wars, the defence apparatus, the foreign policy implications of foreign conflicts, arms exports and transport security. In the late 1990s these did not disappear but were supplemented by human security, humanitarian intervention, economic sanctions and common EU security policies, reflecting wider policy agendas. The 2000s were dominated by what Jason Burke calls the '9/11 wars' of Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, plus an expansion of counter-terrorism and on-going issues in Northern Ireland.<sup>54</sup> The 2010s see the emergence of more 'risk-based' problematisations such as energy and food security, technological issues such as data retention and surveillance, and more populist issues such as border security.

Despite academic calls to 'forget 9/11', it is impossible to ignore the influence of 9/11 on security policy agendas and parliamentary interest in security.<sup>55</sup> There is a clear jump in committee activity, from barely out of single figures in the 80s and 90s to numbers in the high teens in the 2000s and (ongoing) 2010s. The growth in committee activity on security from 2001 reflects an expanded meaning of security more generally and the growing security agendas of UK government, EU institutions and other governments internationally. Yet, this means that security politics after 9/11 was characterised more by parliamentary normalisation than sovereign exceptionalism.<sup>56</sup> The extent of activity was such that the old anti-political taboos and exclusive prerogatives of security, reflected in the Copenhagen School's 'strict criteria', were no longer the dominant logic, despite heightened security concerns in the early 2000s. Much of this activity was certainly politicised in a qualitative sense: for example, parliament tackled controversial issues such as detention without trial of foreign terrorist suspects, and there were heavily contested struggles and rebellions over counter-terrorist legislation. This controversy and contestation certainly drove parliamentary mobilisation and activity on security-related topics. However, these qualitative forms of politicisation do not tell

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<sup>54</sup> Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Harmonie Toros, "'9/11 Is Alive and Well' or How Critical Terrorism Studies Has Sustained the 9/11 Narrative," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2017); Maja Zehfuss, "Forget September 11," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>56</sup> Neal, "Normalization and Legislative Exceptionalism: Counterterrorist Lawmaking and the Changing Times of Security Emergencies."

the whole story of the increasing volume of parliamentary activity on security. Much of the activity listed was not controversial, highly contested or a source of parliamentary or wider social mobilisation.

The tables show a general trend of security becoming less ‘exceptional’ and more ‘normal’ in political terms over time, but the pattern is more complex than a simple linear progression. Institutionally securitised ‘exceptional’ areas such as secret intelligence still exist today and function in historically familiar ways, for example with parliamentary struggles over access. For example, the Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defence and what was then Trade and Industry Committee have since the 1980s demanded access to intelligence material and to the intelligence agencies themselves.<sup>57</sup> The Northern Ireland committee added to this demand later. Their call for more oversight of the intelligence agencies was partially met with the creation of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) in 1994, followed by ISC reform in 2013 to give it more powers and make it more a creature of parliament. However, this has not solved the fundamental issue of an intelligence and security ‘black box’ at the heart of the state. Furthermore, the government has used the existence of the ISC as the ‘proper’ venue for intelligence oversight as a reason to continue denying other parliamentary committees access to intelligence.<sup>58</sup> The ‘black box’ of secret intelligence has become more visible and accountable, but the fundamentals remain. Of course, there is a long-running political and academic debate about intelligence oversight and reform of the ISC, but this is only a small part of the wider trend analysed in this article.<sup>59</sup>

It is also the case that some aspects of security policy and scrutiny were part of ‘normal politics’ even in the 1980s. For example, the Public Accounts Committee has for many decades scrutinised defence expenditure in the same way as other policy areas. The Transport Committee has throughout the period under investigation inquired into aspects of transport security, such as at airports and on the railways, without coming into contention with state security prerogatives.

What this means is that committees have not often overcome the depoliticising structural constraints of traditional security politics per se, such as by gaining access to intelligence. It is more that the broadening of security agendas and practices since 9/11 in

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<sup>57</sup> Bochel, Defty, and Kirkpatrick, *Watching the Watchers*, 112-3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 117-4.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Gill, "Intelligence, Threat, Risk and the Challenge of Oversight," *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 2 (2012); Mark Phythian, "The British Experience with Intelligence Accountability," *ibid.* 22, no. 1 (2007).

particular has created new opportunities for committee activity. As problematisations of 'security' have broadened to include more parts of government, so they encompassed more parliamentary committee activity.

There are many examples of how this has happened. For example, counter-terrorism was once the preserve of MI5 and the Metropolitan Police (specifically 'Special Branch' in the 1980s table above), but in the 2000s the PREVENT counter terrorism strategy extended it into the Department for Communities and Local Government; in turn PREVENT was moved to the Home Office in 2010. This process created opportunities for the departmental select committees that shadow these ministries to conduct security-related oversight. In another example, when the (now defunct) Department for Energy and Climate Change made policy on energy and food security it was not surprising to find that the Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee inquired into the same topics.

In other cases, committee activity followed events or emerging policy issues, for example 'Computer Security in Government Departments' (Public Accounts Committee 1988), 'The Private Security Industry' (Home Affairs Committee 1994), or 'Olympics Security' (Home Affairs Committee 2012). Other inquiries were more exercises in 'blue-skies thinking', such as a 2012 Public Administration Select Committee inquiry on 'national strategy'. Security-relevant topical committees created in the last 30 years added to the trend of growing engagement, such as the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) which amongst other things considers the human rights implications of new security legislation and the security powers of the state.

Increased parliamentary activity on security may be part of wider trends in the changing relationship between parliament and government, with parliamentarians becoming more independent and less deferential.<sup>60</sup> Not only have the scope and meaning of security expanded over the period under analysis, but so too have the general activities and outlook of committees themselves, becoming bolder and freer (at least according to some interpretations).<sup>61</sup> This reflects a wider trend whereby parliament has gradually asserted more independence from the executive. In this context, some committees have engaged with security in unexpected ways. For example, although it would be expected for the Defence Committee to scrutinise the

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<sup>60</sup> Scott Kelly, *The Slow Death of the 'Efficient Secret': The Rise of MP Independence, Its Causes and Its Implications*.

<sup>61</sup> Bates, Goodwin, and McKay, "Do UK MPs Engage More with Select Committees since the Wright Reforms?: An Interrupted Time Series Analysis, 1979-2016."; Fisher, "The Growing Power and Autonomy of House of Commons Select Committees: Causes and Effects."



Ministry of Defence, it is less obvious that the Public Administration Committee would devote time and resources to examining ‘national strategy’.<sup>62</sup> When it launched this inquiry, the committee had made a distinct choice to do so, and it pressed the government to pursue an even broader approach to security than already pursued in the National Security Strategy.

## Conclusion

This article has aimed to conceptualise and demonstrate a different form of politicisation to that commonly discussed in the literature. This is politicisation by volume, based on the appearance of issues in a particular political arena. This contrasts with the more familiar qualitative forms of politicisation such as controversy, contestation and mobilisation, but it is not mutually exclusive to them. Politicisation by volume may well be the product of the qualitative politicisation of security issues – for example, if security scandals prompt parliamentary committee inquiries – but not necessarily. Parliamentary activity on security may also be more routine – such as with committee reviews of how security policies are working. The concept of politicisation by volume captures the trend of increasing political activity, and also the sense that when issues become subject to the everyday work of parliamentary politicians when previously they were not, this should be understood as a form of politicisation.

This article developed the concept of politicisation by volume from the idea of ‘arena shifting’ that is present in the British depoliticisation debate and to a lesser extent in securitisation theory. In the former, depoliticisation results from the shift of issues out of the public arena of ministerial responsibility and democratic accountability in favour of technical agencies and impersonal forces. In the latter, securitisation depoliticises by shifting security politics towards ‘the narrowing of choice, [and] the empowerment of a smaller elite’, and by taking security issues out of ‘normal’ political processes (such as parliamentary scrutiny and oversight).<sup>63</sup> Inverting these frameworks, this article aimed to conceptualise and analyse politicisation as the phenomenon of issues appearing and being handled in the ‘normal’ arena of parliamentary politics, when previously they were excluded or simply not present.

If we were to focus only on the contentious, qualitatively-politicised parliamentary struggles with the government over traditional and ‘hard’ aspects of security such as war and intelligence, the impression might be that the old fundamentals of ‘institutionally securitised’

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<sup>62</sup> House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, "Strategic Thinking in Government: Without National Strategy, Can Viable Government Strategy Emerge?," in *Twenty Fourth Report of Session 2010-12* (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2012).

<sup>63</sup> Wæver, "Politics, Security, Theory," 469.

security politics have changed little. Indeed, although since the 1980s the UK has gone from a situation of no democratic oversight of intelligence (except ministerial oversight) to one of parliamentary oversight by a closed-door statutory committee, the underlying 'exceptional' logic of executive prerogative and secrecy remains more or less intact. Similarly, parliament has been struggling to gain a constitutional say over war powers since the 2003 Iraq War, and it is unclear whether a constitutional norm has been established or not.<sup>64</sup>

However, this article has shown that by taking a different view of politicisation as increased volume of parliamentary activity, a bigger picture starts to emerge. Although the old sovereign prerogatives of 'exceptionalism' and 'hard security' still exist, security problematisations have permeated the 'normal politics' of parliament. Security is subject to an increasing volume of activity of parliamentary politicians, and in this sense it has been politicised.

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<sup>64</sup> Strong, "The War Powers of the British Parliament: What Has Been Established and What Remains Unclear?." Note that Prime Minister Theresa May did not consult parliament in her April 2018 decision to join US air strikes in Syria.

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